

About 

## The Ghosts Within

Most of us think of a ghost as something that only exists after we die, which continues to hang around and haunt the places we lived while alive. What if there are ghosts of yourself that are around while you are alive? What if what you think you are is actually a ghost?

As we usually think of them, ghosts are insubstantial forms that come and go. They aren't solid or real, and most people can't see them. And yet, how substantial or real are our images of ourselves, our ideas about who we are? If you have an image of yourself as an attractive person one day and an unattractive person the next day, how real is either image? And can other people see your self-image? What does it mean if you have a self-image of being unattractive and someone is attracted to you anyway? Maybe they can't see your self-image. Maybe your self-image is a kind of ghost. We aren't always willing to see that our idea of ourselves is a kind of ghost because we really believe that our self-image is what we are.

We may wonder, "Who am I if what I think I am is something insubstantial and not real? What is here besides the ghosts of my self-images?" There's a sense that we do exist, that we are real. But does this sense of existence and reality come from our image of ourselves or from something else, something deeper within our being? It's difficult to know for sure, since the self-image and the sense of realness can be present simultaneously, and our egoic idea of ourselves can co-opt that deeper sense of realness.

One measure of how real something is how long it lasts. The more real something is, the longer it lasts. How long do ideas about yourself last? They come and go (like a ghost in a ghost story) and don't last very long at all. A thought is often over so quickly that we can't even remember it a moment later. Images of ourselves are constantly changing and fading away, to be replaced by other images or thoughts about something else. So those images or identities must not be very real. They may just be ghosts in our minds.

What about the pure sense that you exist right now? Does that come and go? How often do you have the opposite sense—that you don't exist at all? The sense that you exist is more real than your ideas about yourself because it doesn't come and go. You exist, but your ideas about yourself are just ghosts. What you are isn't contained in your ideas or identities. What you really are is still here even when your ideas about yourself fade away, like ghostly images in a movie.

What matters is the real you. You can become more curious about this real you than you are about the false ghosts of identity. What is the real you made of? What is it like? What does it want? What can it do? These are rich and meaningful questions to explore, but remember that the real answers aren't found in your ideas about yourself, but only in the simple sense that you exist.

(From the free ebook: *That Is That: Essays About True Nature* available [here](#).)

